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ABSTRACT

This paper contends that sports, dance, and drama should be considered together when studying cultures for purposes of comparison because the basic elements of these three disciplines are found in all societies--primitive and advanced. The paper presents: (1) discussion of pertinent aspects of sport, dance, and drama; (2) examples of comparative studies completed in games, dance, and theater; and (3) suggestions for further studies. Some points of discussion include: (1) the importance of realizing that a performance (sport, dance, or theater event) requires the participation of many who are not performers; (2) actual performances are complexly orchestrated with several things happening simultaneously; (3) the performance reflects the culture; and (4) the performers willingly suffer for the performance. Suggested foci for further studies include altered states of consciousness in performance, and the changing of traditional forms of sport, dance, or theater into commercially evaluated "airport art." (MM)

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Research in Comparative Physical Education

Some Interdisciplinary Considerations

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The basic elements of sports, dance and drama are found in every society no matter how primitive or advanced. It is the contention of this paper that these three areas should be considered together when we are studying cultures for purposes of comparison.

The paper consists of three parts. First, pertinent aspects of the cultural context of sport, dance and drama will be discussed, in order to provide ideas and considerations, which may be used in comparative studies.

Second, examples of comparative studies which have already been completed in games, dance and theatre will be briefly described in order to indicate areas of focus which may be considered when comparing the three forms. Third, ideas for further studies will be suggested.

Dance, drama and sport today have many elements in common. For example, the three forms take place in spatially circumscribed environments, have elements of display, make believe, competition and strategy in them and require a certain amount of physical skill.

The term spatially circumscribed environments refers to the playing area, which may be a circle of bare ground in Bali, a thickly grassed area in New Guinea, a basketball court in the U.S.A., or a sandy beach in Polynesia. The playing area is usually surrounded by a place for the audience, musical accompanist, the directors of the play, the coach or any supportive casts such as cheerleaders or choruses.

It is not necessary to enunciate the elements of display in sport, dance or drama, they are obvious. Although they vary in their overt forms in different cultures, they are always present in all movement forms.

The element of make believe which to many westerners may be obvious in dance and drama is ever present in sport and games. For, when we play a game we are acting out a role, we are participating in an unspoken dialogue between players. There is also a subjective presentness to this dialogue which is different to everyday living. e.g. If I am playing tennis, the subjective time of the event is not April, 1976 but is relative to the time between shots, the timing of the strokes. The subjective place of the event is not Milwaukee, U.S.A.,

but the constantly changing spatial area between my opponent and me.

The physical elements which are mentioned above may be used to compare dances, sports, and dramas within the same culture, in different cultures, in different countries, or within different subcultures of an holistic culture.

Using these common elements and others which will be discussed later, we may compare not only dance with dance, sport with sport, and drama with drama, but we may also compare the dance with sport, drama with sport and so on within the respective cultures.

It is important to emphasize the terms dance culture, sport culture, theatre culture. By these we mean the implicit as well as the explicit aspects of the dance sport or drama and their reason for being. Without understanding the culture, comparisons would be inadequate. A dance culture, sport culture or theature culture must be researched for answers to the same questions asked by the good journalists -- that is, who, what, when, where, why and how? Too often what and how are the prime considerations given by researchers, but who, when, where and why are of equal importance. These criteria should include the negative as well as the positive measurements. In other words, we should ask who does not participate, what is not included, when is it not done, when is it not given, why are certain reasons for existence not appropriate and what selective process has excluded certain possibilities of the how criterion? Indeed the negative aspects are often as instructive as the positive aspects.

(Because the repeated use of the terms sport, drama and dance would be cumbersone, they will be referred to collectively as performances for the remainder of this paper as the same ideas can be applied to all three.)

It is important to realize that a performance requires the participation of many people who are not performers. That is an obvious statement to any performer who remembers the debt owed to the many people who helped with the arrangements, costumers, directors, coaches, linesmen, public relations people and so forth. Unfortunately, these nonperformer participants

have not been recognized in many studies.

During the performance itself, a variety of roles are performed. Some are obvious, others are not. These roles reflect the division of labor and the network of interpersonal relationships between male and female, chief to village member, man to nature and man to the supernatural. From the analyses of these roles one becomes aware of the ethos of the people.

The actual performance event is complexly orchestrated through the activities of many people. There are often several things going on simultaneously, e.g. At the local festivals the song girls may be chanting, the band playing, the dancers dancing, the coach screaming all at the same time as the players are playing. The observers of these public performances are definite participants also, and the interrelationships between the observers and the performers are complex are often subtle. In fact, the success or failure of the performance can depend upon the proper thinking or psychic commitment of the audience.

On the covert level, a number of things are going on, not the least of which are psychologically fulfilling aspects, that include the gratifying importance accorded males or females during the victory rituals which follow. For example, in western cultures we have the standing ovation, the presentation of flowers or medals, and the pat on the back or the buttocks. This act of fulfillment is a very important aspect of the total culture and must be considered.

It is also important to remember that the dance, drama or sport itself, will not be a total reproduction of the whole culture, or with such a heavy emphasis that it actually causes a distorted reflection.

An interesting dimension of the quality of the reflection on the culture is to distinguish who are the performers. For example, if performers are selected in contrast to say, letting anyone perform, then those who are chosen represent some kind of model. They may be chosen because they are the prettiest, strongest, most talented, most enduring, most dedicated, best trained and so forth. All of these criteria in that list are quite different one from the other, and what may be important in one culture may not be important at all in another. At any

rate, all of the criteria use a superlative and the superlatives indicate that these criteria represent part of the value system of that culture.

Another point to remember is that the selections for comparison may possibly be made from a group of people who are a typical of the group at large; e.g. the Yaquis at Pascua live in the city of Tucson, Arizona and the colorful religious ceremonies which they perform at Easter and Christmas are only a small segment of the Tucson culture.

Another important consideration for comparison is the willingness of the performer to suffer for his performance. This is a wide spread phenomenon which is fraught with implications. The most exacting suffering is experienced by the performer because a public performance gives no opportunity to withdraw the product if it is faulty. Marcia Siegel emphasizes this point when discussing the dance;

> Dance exists at the perpetual vanishing point. At the moment of its creation it is gone. All of a dancer's years of training, all of the choreographers planning, the rehearsals, the composers, designers and technicians, the gathering together of an audience, all of these are only preparation for an even that disappears in the very act of materializing.[1]

In order to explain the willingness for the performer to suffer for the performance, we must conclude that the performance is an intensely value laden epitome of the culture. If the emphasis is on artistry, the thrust is on the skillful behavior of the artists, and the ultimate as assessment is derived from the perfection of the performance. If the emphasis is on participation, the thrust is on the correct following of the rules and the ultimate assessment is on the total effect.

The above discussion mentions a few of the elements which must be taken into consideration when comparing performances within cultures. We can also learn from the mistakes which have been made by past researchers in the comparative area of the disciplines. e.g. Emphasis on form by European researchers and on function by their American counterparts, seems to be the result of a long tradition, in dance research. In Europe,

the early collectors were, for the most part, folklorists and dance enthusiasts for whom the dance was the all important object of the study. The unhappy result of many of these studies was detailed choreographies, recorded without a mention of the social context. Just the reverse held true for North America, where Indian dance was recorded by ethnographers whose interest in the dance was, in most cases, peripheral, and who were not competent to record the dance in any systematic fashion. One finds, therefore, that the majority of early American Studies include very little actual description of the dance.

However, there have been some excellent comparative studies in the area of dance. Two, based on original research, were done by Joanne Kealiinohomoku. The earlier one, "A Comparative Study of the Dance as a Constellation of Motor Behaviors Among African and United States Negroes"[2] uses data gathered from films of African dance and from observation of American negro dance. Another excellent study is her comparative analysis of Hopi and Polynesian dance.[3] After a rather complete comparison of the gestural systems, performers, choreography and performance style of both cultures, she presents the following conclusions. Hopi dances are impersonal, traditional and conservative and function to supplicate the gods, to maintain tribal unity and to propound tribal values. Polynesian dances on the other hand, are personalized, less tradition bound and encourage improvization. They function, entertain, display and propitiate the gods. The author succeeds in demonstrating the uniqueness of each area through its dance forms.

Other comparative studies take the same performance complex and compare its function in different cultures. In a study completed in 1975, Aristotle's criteria for drama were successfully applied to the American sport of inter-collegiate basketball. The physical aspects such as scenery and properties were also considered.

Interestingly, the results of this study were almost identical to those obtained in a similar study compiled in 1967 on an Australian aboriginal tribe. It was found that both cultures used the same performance complex for similar ends.

A compilation from previous studies of the Polynesian, the Australian aboriginal, the Eskimo and the Melanesian was completed

by Howell. As well as tabulating the comparisons which he made, Howell made thirteen generalizations, two of which will be included in this paper for consideration by future researchers. He found first, that games are indeed a mirror of a particular society and second, the amount of evidence of a particular activity is not necessarily related to the amount of that activity in the society.[4] These findings tend to reinforce a point which was made earlier in this paper, that is, the performance selectively reveals the culture and may actually cause a distorted reflection.

Another interesting cross-cultural study of games was that of Jane Waugh titled "Chance Elements in American Indian Handgames: and their Musical Accompaniment." In her opening remarks she suggests that the practice of gambling, age old and world wide, cannot be contained by any single discipline.

> The ethnologist can trace it back to prehistory, and using this, compares the variations of types of play used by various societies. The mathematician becomes both fascinated and excited by its quantifiable uncertainties, and the theory of probability which, today, influences almost every field of science, had its origin in the study of games of chance. Indeed, recently, in modern art and music, and dance, the use of chance elements, has created great excitement and discovery.

Further Waugh states that

> The contrast between Indians, expressing excitement of game, through song and dance, and Westerners with their traditional poker face is very apparent. In the Monte Carlo type of casino, the gambler gains social approval by his show of nonchalance, win or lose. Perhaps this is a question connected with the place of gambling in societies. To the American Indian, gambling is fully accepted, whilst in the Western tradition, it is indeed question.[5]

There are any number of areas of focus which may be used to compare dance, games and/or sport, and drama, either across cultures or within a culture. An area which immediately comes to mind is that called "altered states of consciousness." Anthropologists have completed numerous studies on altered

states of consciousness associated with dance and drama. Those in comparative physical education research should explore further the altered states of consciousness which occur in various sports throughout the world. Most people have experienced a change in consciousness in the peak of competition - a time when the immediate surroundings almost cease to exist for the competitor. Are these altered states of consciousness the same for all sport participants?

Another area on which a study might focus is that of the changing of traditional forms into "airport art". Play, dance and theatre forms become airport art when they are used solely for display, are evaluated solely by the price the commerical consumer is prepared to pay for them and their trappings are sold in the souvenir shops around the world. Here, unfortunately, the norms and values of the society are affirmed solely through monetary gain.

In conclusion, I would like to paraphrase Margaret L. Cormack -

> THE WORLD IS OUR HOME, AND WE ARE BEGINNING TO KNOW HOW TO LIVE IN IT, LET US ENJOY THE GAMES, DANCE, AND THEATRE FROM OTHER CULTURES WITHOUT MAKING THEM OVER IN OUR IMAGE.[6]

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